

Film stirs up assassination dispute

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PRESIDENT Kennedy's assassination was a shocking nightmare when we lived through it in reality 10 years ago.

It is still a mind numbing nightmare a decade later—even in the format of a suspense movie, "Executive Action," a movie which in its turn may stir new controversies, renewed speculations, doubts and conclusions reviving as it does the conspiracy theory.

The scar tissue is still near the surface. It may even be more sensitive in Dallas. That may make all the more stunning the emotional impact of watching that open air Presidential limousine — in old newsreel footage and in re-creation—turn off Main onto Houston, round the corner at Elm slowing to start down the slope in front of the School Book Depository Building.

Shots ring out. The President slumps forward. Then Governor Connally. Then the President's wife hovers over him as the car speeds off to Parkland Hospital. If there is any credibility to the conspiracy theory set forth in "Executive Action," the senses are equally unable to accept the fact of the act itself which the Warren Report concluded was that of a single gunman, Lee Harvey Oswald.

Oswald, as we see again in old newsreels, declared he was "a Patsy" on one of those occasions when he was being lead past a swarm of scrambling

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newsmen in the hall at the Dallas police station after his arrest. That appears to supply the key to "Executive Action," which opened Friday at the new Valley View theater, at LBJ and Preston in the Valley View shopping center.

In fashioning the screenplay for "Executive Action," Dalton Trumbo leaned heavily on two books: "Six Seconds in Dallas," by Josiah Thompson, and Sylvia Meager's "Accessories to the Fact"—although the film's credits read from a story by Donald Freed

and Mark Lane. Producer Edward Lewis stated in a New York interview this week, however, that Trumbo had rejected the original story by Lane and Freed, because it had gone too far. "Many of the statements could not be supported by fact," said Lewis.

That fact alone should offer a source of relief to those naturally fearful of any inflammatory smear the film might contain against Dallas. While it certainly does not play down the fact of Dallas in a historic sense, the conspirators of "Executive Action" are a group of wealthy, dignified appearing men operating out of a mansion in what looks like it may be the countryside of Virginia near the capitol.

They are men fearful of a Kennedy dynasty, two terms for John, two for Robert and two for Ted. One (Will Geer) early states he is as right-wing as any of the others, but the specter of the rising millions of blacks, browns, and Asians in the world and Kennedy's determination to bring our men out of Viet Nam appears to be the deciding factor in their plan to remove him from office by the only means possible. Trumbo very neatly avoids any heavy messages or poses or posturing on the parts of the conspirators. They are a cynical group worried about losing an economical position. It is as simple as that.

Robert Ryan, who died of cancer after the filming of "Executive Action," is the leader of the group. It is left to Burt Lancaster, however, as an associate, to put the plan into action. Two groups of gunmen go into training. One will ultimately draw the assignment and be told their target.

So (not unlike the recent "Day of the Jackal", that fictional suspense tale inspired by other historic events) begins the step by step process of plotting "the scenario"—as it is frequently referred to. It is decided a motorcade offers the best opportunity. When it is announced after a visit to Washington from Texas governor John Connally that Kennedy will visit the state in the fall it is decided that timing will work perfectly. It will be done in Texas. The plot narrows in on Dallas because of the circumstances of the motorcade route and the discovery of the figure of Oswald who can be used as "the Patsy."

In skillfully blending together fact, with its fiction, "Executive Action" indicates the conspirators have access to the FBI and CIA because they are veterans of these organizations. This is never flatly stated, however, and the

viewer may draw his own conclusions about this and other elements, such as Oswald's shadowy background, including his stay in Russia which is interpreted by the conspirators as having possible secret overtones.

Scattered through the course of the film are many disturbing facts. Lincoln, Garfield and McKinley were all assassinated, and attempts were made on both Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt. Yet while DeGaulle never appeared in public with less than 48 motorcycle protective guards, our own President was guarded by only nine. The Secret Service men received less pay than the FBI. No information was supplied to the Secret Service from either the FBI or CIA about assassination threats or related matters. These nag and tug at the viewer disturbingly.

One value of fiction is that it may be organized in a more logical pattern than reality often is — as current events are so vividly illustrating for us once again. "Executive Action" therefore is able to arrange its "scenario" in this manner. The question of its accuracy has to be left to the individual.

Oswald, as the film has it, was not even involved in the plot. One gunman had a rifle similar to Oswald's Italian Mannlicher-Carcano rifle, a notoriously inaccurate weapon. He was in the Depository, another was on the Records Building, a third on the grassy slope of Deely Plaza setting up a triangular pattern. All escaped in the confusion, one muttering in disgust he had hit a secondary target.

As for other Dallas factors events here seem only to coincide to the favor of the conspirators. We see the hostile reception to Ambassador Adlai Stevenson here on United Nations Day in October, 1953, again with newsreel and in fictional recreation. That was historic fact. So were the "Warrant"

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